

Guidelines for Homework and Class Preparation

Note: Dual Submission: All homework must be typed and submitted both electronically over email (before class) and in hard copy at the class meeting.

The purpose of regular homework assignments is to help strengthen your skills in “reading as a writer,” focusing on the ways in which authors craft their pieces to address intended audiences. Throughout the term, you will regularly submit short assignments (approx. 1- 1 1/2 typed pg., double-spaced) on required readings and films for class. Some homework assignments are listed on the course calendar; others will be distributed in class or emailed to students. For other assignments, I will ask you to answer specific questions. Other assignments are more open-ended; you can choose to focus on one or more aspects of the writer’s craft. These assignments will help to prepare you for class discussions as well as your own essay writing.

Here are some general questions to consider in reviewing assigned readings for class. In your homework assignments, you may only focus on a few questions. However, thinking about all of them will be very helpful in preparing for class discussions.

- What is the meaning of the title? Why do you think the author chose this specific title?
- What is the tone of the piece –persuasive, angry, informative/neutral, ironic, humorous?
- What kind of language has the writer chosen for the piece- e.g., direct and simple, colloquial, abstract “high academic”, personal/confessional, comic? Does the tone shift over the course of the piece? What is the effect(s) on you as a reader? What do you think s/he assumes about the audience?
- How does the writer begin and end the piece? What do the introduction and conclusion suggest about how to interpret the essay?
- What sections, paragraphs, words or sentences seem especially powerful? Why?
- How does the writer use the tools of fiction (character, setting, dialogue) in nonfiction?
- How does the writer sequence the essay in time (e.g., using flashbacks, flashforwards, starting “in media res”, in the middle of the action)?
- In what ways does the writer employ imagery, symbol and metaphor?
- Does the writer use rhetorical devices such as repetition? What is the effect?
- What seems to be the central point of the piece?
- How do you see this essay as connecting with other readings (for the course or outside), your life experiences, and issues that you have thought about?
- What have you learned as a writer from this piece? Do you see yourself using or avoiding some of the same approaches or techniques as a particular writer?

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